DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 247 040 RC 014 435

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TITLE Linking Knowledge and Action: PRI's Community Consultant.
INSTITUTION Partnership for Rural Improvement, Pullman, Wash.
SPONS AGENCY Kellogg Foundation, Battle Creek, Mich.
PUB DATE Nov 79
NOTE 51p.; For related documents, see ED 235 983-985.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Burnout; Change; *Consultants; Group Dynamics; Human Resources; Individual Characteristics; Job Skills; *Linking Agents; *Occupational Information; Rural Areas; *Rural Development; *Staff Role; Work Environment
IDENTIFIERS *Partnership for Rural Improvement

ABSTRACT

Within the Partnership for Rural Improvement (PRI), community consultants operate within three complex sets of relationships: client groups, the organizational structure of PRI, and the local operational base. Community consultants are responsible for developing and facilitating rural development and for providing assistance in community and regional organization and rural development processes. PRI community consultants are effective as trainers, change agents, resource linkers, nurturers, and mediators, due principally to their non-aligned position within the consortium of public service organizations. Community consultants help people increase their own capacities to develop and facilitate rural development, stimulate and encourage communication and collaboration among organizations and agencies, maintain contact with agencies and institutions outside the area whose goals are related to the PRI, assist citizen involvement in planning and decision-making in PRI-sponsored programs, utilize a working knowledge of the community and regional structure in their assigned area, and identify emerging community issues and priorities. Successful community consultants must develop an understanding of their own attitudes, values, and perceptions, and the effect these have on their actions; have a personal commitment to continued learning and growth; avoid burnout; facilitate local autonomy and control in an unobtrusive fashion; be committed to humanity, democracy, objectivity, and change; and understand the dynamics of their own and others' power. (NQA)

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LINKING KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION:

PRI'S COMMUNITY CONSULTANT

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NOVEMBER 1979

RC014435

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This paper is an attempt to document the role of one staff position within The Partnership for Rural Improvement (PRI), that of the Community Consultant. Within PRI's operating structure there are three Community Consultants, operating respectively in three Community College districts in Washington State, namely Wenatchee Valley Community College district, Big Bend Community College district, and Spokane Community College district. Before examining the role of the Community Consultant in detail, let us first examine the organizational structure and background of PRI.

The Partnership for Rural Improvement was formed in 1976 by a number of educational institutions and public agencies to develop, install and evaluate improved approaches to rural development in an eleven county region of north central and northeastern Washington. It is funded in part by a $1,000,000 four-year grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan. Project headquarters are at Washington State University.

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The goals of the Partnership focus on improving the quality of life in rural areas, through increased integration and cooperation among service and resource delivery agencies and organizations. A vast array of public and private agencies and organizations provide services to rural areas, but often in isolation from each other and in piecemeal approaches. PRI aims to increase the efficiency in the delivery and utilization of knowledge through a collaborative effort among the educational institutions, support agencies and local jurisdictions.

Lassey and Hagood* briefly summarize the basic rationale for the program:

> The development potential of a region is limited in major part by internal and external resources available to it. Development of internal resources is dependent on the ability of governmental jurisdictions (counties, towns, cities) and nongovernmental organizations to use external resources. Jurisdictions do not generally have sufficient internal resources to unilaterally generate development and are therefore dependent on external resources channeled through organizations (public and private) probably headquartered outside the jurisdiction or region. The outside agencies and organizations have professional and/or financial resources mandated for rural development but are dependent upon decisions in the local jurisdiction for the appropriate allocation of those resources.
>
> Furthermore, the rural region, local jurisdictions and organizations are dependent upon conveners, educators, and continuing logistical support for collaboration. The assumption is that the desired output - rural development - will be greater as a consequence of collaborative interdependence and greater utilization of knowledge, in contrast to independent and unilateral actions taken separately by each agency or organization.

*From their paper "Collaboration and Integration in Rural Development," prepared for presentation to the annual meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Madison, Wisconsin, September, 1987. Lassey is Professor of Sociology and Environmental Science, and Rural Sociologist at Washington State University. Hagood is Administrator of the Partnership for Rural Improvement and Extension Community Development Specialist, Washington State University.

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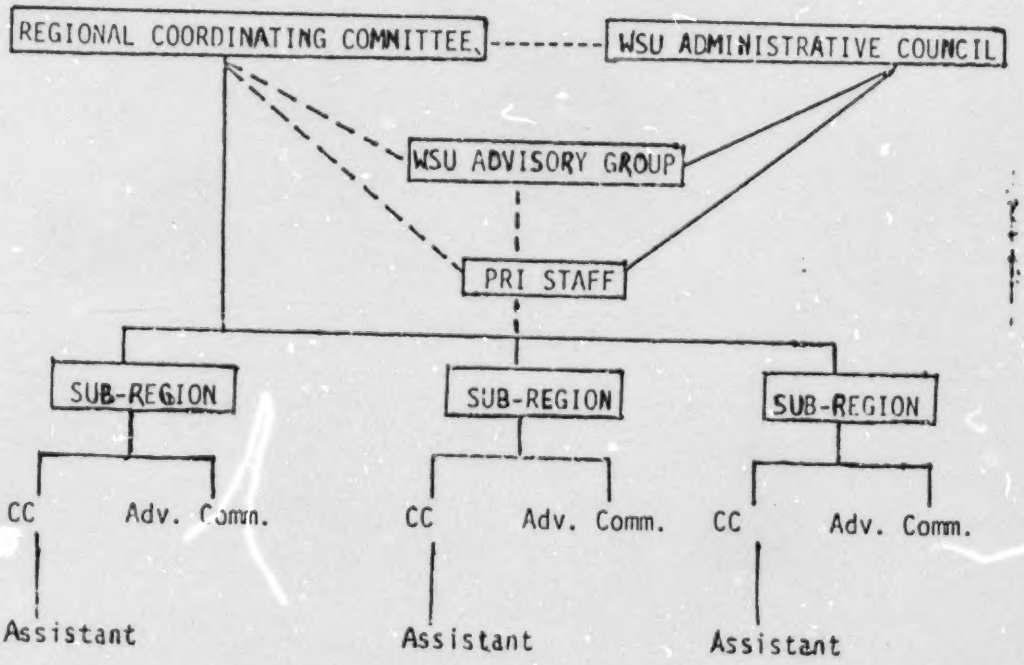
PRI's program elements are depicted in Figure 1, showing the operating structure of the various components. The Regional Coordinating Committee (RCC) is the primary decision making body and is composed of members representing the interests of various institutions and agencies which serve rural areas. The RCC approves contracted arrangements, program procedures, and projects to be undertaken.

The WSU Administrative Council is composed of various deans, the director of Cooperative Extension Service (CES), and oversees the administration of PRI including review of program and fiscal management. The WSU Advisory Group is composed of various department chairpersons and CES administrators, and serves an advisory function to the Administrative Council and PRI staff.

The PRI staff consists of an administrator, program associates, community consultants, and community assistants. Individual staff members are responsible to the institutional units to which they are assigned and report through the Administrator in coordinating PRI-related activities.

The staff manages the program within the conditions of the grant and policy established by the Regional Coordinating Committee. In cooperation with the partners, the staff explores and defines issues, established linkages, seeks resources, develops plans, evaluates and reports. The staff has the responsibility to work closely with regional and sub-regional representatives to assist them in conceptualizing and designing plans and strategies. The staff also monitors regional and sub-regional group progress and serves as linkers, catalysts, information givers

FIGURE 1. PARTNERSHIP FOR RURAL IMPROVEMENT OPERATING STRUCTURE



_____ Administration and Management

-------- Liaison

CC – Community Consultant

Adv. Comm. – Advisory Committee

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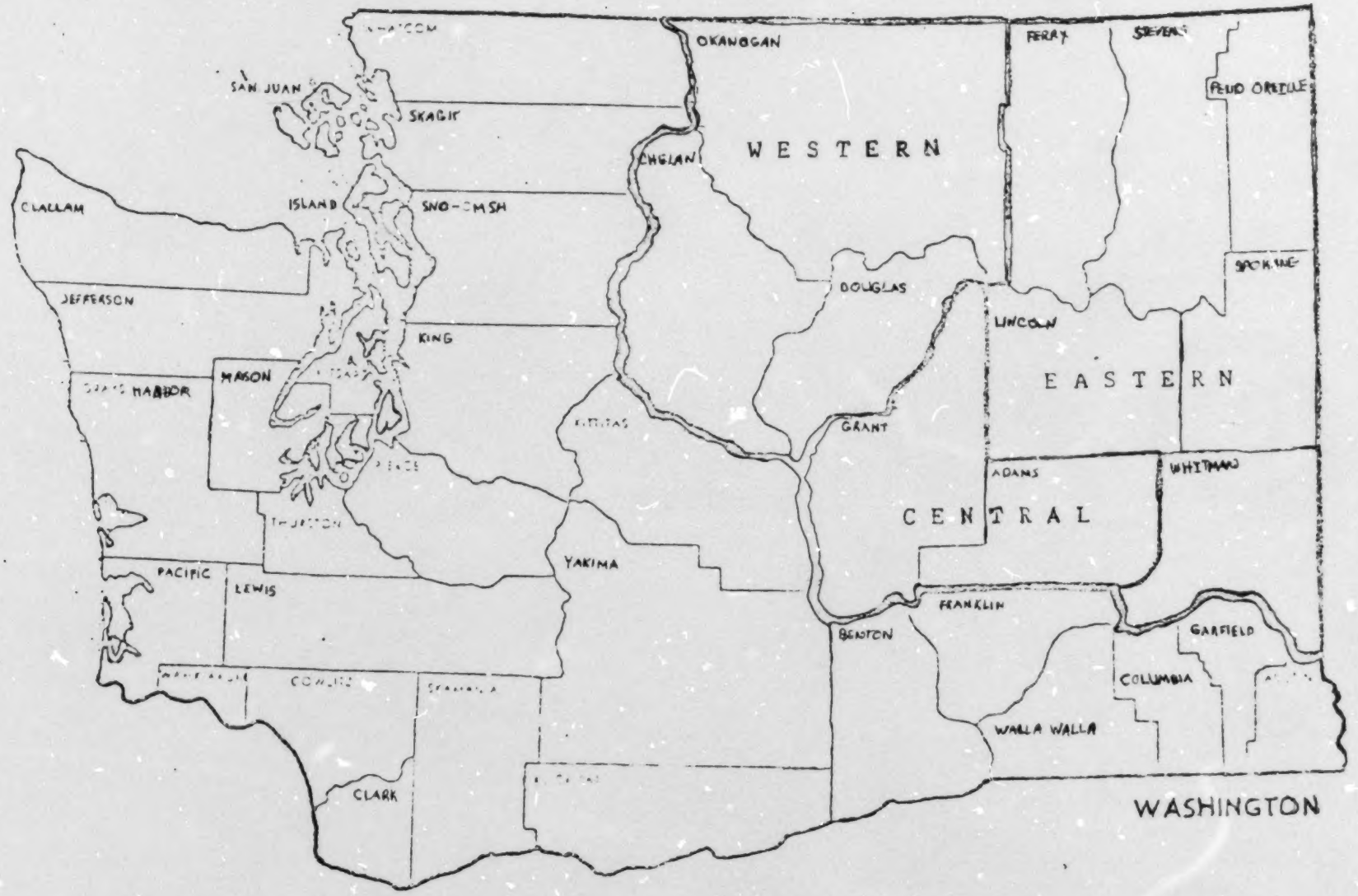
FIGURE 2 MAP OF REGION AND SUB-REGIONS



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and process specialists.

The Partnership is divided into three sub-regions with a Sub-Regional Group providing policy guidance for each sub-region. The sub-regions are comprised of the following counties: 1) Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens, and Whitman; 2) Chelan, Douglas and Okanogan; 3) Adams and Grant. The geographic divisions are based upon community college district boundaries with community colleges serving as fiscal agents for each of the sub-regions (See Figure 2).

Membership varies for each sub-region. Each designates its own organizational arrangements including officers, membership, meetings, policy and modes of operation. A nominee to the PRI Regional Coordinating Committee represents the sub-region and functions as the liaison between the sub-regional group and the Committee.

The primary functions of the sub-regional groups are to initiate, plan, and implement local projects within programming guidelines, with support from the Community Consultant assigned to their sub-regions, other PRI staff, and professionals from collaborating organizations.

This paper examines the Community Consultant (CC) role, then within the framework of PRI's operating structure and the Partnership as a whole. The case will be made that the Community Consultant does not possess unique skills or abilities and does not perform unique functions.

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Rather the uniqueness of the role stems from its "non-allegiance" within a consortium of often competitive and territorial partners, and it is precisely this interorganizational base that enables the Community Consultant to assume such an unparalleled role.

Four functions will be identified that serve as a basis for the work of the Community Consultant: 1) training, 2) program planning, and development, 3) resource linking, and 4) organizational maintenance. Two further questions will be posed: 1) whether or not the need actually exists for a neutral third party who organized, nurtures, and maintains the optimal level of interorganizational cooperation, and 2) whether or not these functions can be performed by a staff member from one of the participating partners (e.g. Cooperative Extension).

DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMUNITY CONSULTANT POSITION

In early June, 1976, at a three-day conference convened by PRI and considered the formal launching of the program, the idea of sub-dividing the 11-county region and placing a full-time Community Consultant in each subregion was suggested. Prior to that time, the need for an individual "out in the field," and a role and function for that person was recognized but it was a significantly different form than that which exists today in the Community Consultant role.

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The grant proposal to the Kellogg Foundation in September, 1975, makes brief mention of staff:

> The Program Staff will consist of faculty specialists appointed on a part-time basis from participating colleges of Washington State University, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Eastern Washington State College, and community colleges. They will serve a linkage function between educational institutions, while directly supporting the program activities. Field staff will be located in the community colleges and Cooperative Extension Service offices in the region and will be administratively responsible jointly to their respective community college or Extension supervisor and the Program Director, administrators of community colleges and the Cooperative Extension Service.

It was not until late June, 1976, at PRI's Policy Council Meeting, that a "position description" for the Field Community Consultant was presented. As stated in the minutes of the meeting, the goal of the position was:

> to provide assistance in community and regional organization and rural development processes. The Community Consultant will be responsible for developing and facilitating rural development. Community Consultants help people to increase their own capacities to do these things.

Major duties and responsibilities were:

1. Stimulate and encourage communication and collaboration among organizations and agencies to assist rural improvement. Maintain contact with agencies and institutions outside the area whose goals are related to the Partnership for Rural Improvement.

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2. Assist citizen involvement in planning and decision-making in PRI-sponsored programs. This includes working to design programs to teach skills in planning, development, and the group processes required to achieve rural improvement.

3. Develop participation in and utilize a working knowledge of the community and regional structure in the assigned area, to include: the economic forces from inside and outside the area which affect the economy; the social and cultural character of the area; organizational and institutional framework; political and governmental arrangements; public decision-making processes; natural resource base; and environmental characteristics.

4. Help identify emerging community issues and priorities for which educational programs might be useful. Develop collaborative programs for achieving rural area and community development.

5. Develop a working knowledge of local, state and federal programs which might be utilized in the resolution of problems and opportunities in rural areas and communities.

The position description developed at that meeting is still operative, however, the number of positions has been increased. In June of 1976, 1.5 FTE was planned for, shortly thereafter two Community Consultants were hired, and now there is one Community Consultant working in each of the three subregions; in addition each subregion has a Community Assistant. Initially, it was thought that the Eastern subregion would have the full-time Community Consultant and the Western and Central subregions would share a Community Consultant. However, PRI found that for each subregion to realize its potential, a full-time staff member was required.

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COMMUNITY CONSULTANT ROLE DOCUMENTATION

The role of the Community consultant can be understood as operating at all times within three complex sets of relationships: client groups, organized base (i.e., Regional Coordinating Committee, WSU Administrative Council, PRI staff), and local operational base (i.e. respective community college and subregional comittee).

CLIENT GROUPS

The first area to be dealt with, in which the PRI Community Consultant operates and maintains solid, on-going relationships, is that of "client groups." These groups consisting of either (or both) public officials or/and private citizens in communities within the Community Consultant's geographical jurisdiction. The client groups range from a cadre of citizens interested in establishing a county-wide rural library system to a coalition of citizens and public officials organizing a public forum addressing the emerging needs of rural women. The term client group, then, is used in this paper as a "wide open" term, and could potentially be used to refer to any group of individuals, large or small, within the Community Consultant's jurisdiction.

A good percentage of the Community Consultant's time involves work with these client groups, for it is here that the testing and evaluation of resource delivery and community development models occurs. Relative to this model testing the Community Consultant typically operates within a broad conceptual framework involving six basic stages:

The participants involved in the traning workshops held administrative positions or functioned as project directors within an agency. Thus, the emphasis in the training of encouraging collaboration was appropriate, given the expressed need by participants of closer working relationships within the community. The materials and activities for the training were developed that reflect the rural, isloated setting, the scarcity of resources and the unique opportunity for increased effective uses through the development of interagency cooperation.

In this project, the Community Consultant served as one of the trainers, as well as linking the community with other individuals skilled at providing training resources. In all, four trainers worked as a team to facilitate the series of workshops, each working under the auspices of a different institution, and therefore demonstrating, as well as discussing, the notion of collaborative working relationships.

During the course of the training, various community problems were raised by participants which were dealt with in a learning fashion by the Community Consultant and the other trainers, thus facilitating the participants understanding of various problem-solving models. Participants also sought the Community Consultant's help in planning specific interagency strategies for increased networking and collaboration.

Outcomes of this training workshop have been significant. First of all, participants felt strongly enough about the skills they gained to encourage other community members to attend a subsequent workshop series. Secondly, participants have reported more effective working relationships within, and among, agencies.

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Finally, and most significantly, through this "hands on" training, participants claim to have achieved a greater awareness of the decision-making process, and have increased their ability to impact that structure and facilitate purposive change. For rural citizens to be effective, they must significantly rely upon interagency collaboration and network support systems. The PRI model, on this occasion, successfully took the form of training citizens, transferring necessary skills and establishing community networks among participants.

Let us now examine the various functions the Community Consultant assumes in the context of her/his work with client groups. Of the four Community Consultant functions mentioned previously, namely training, program planning, and development, resource linking, and organizational maintenance, the first three will be taken up in this section, while the latter will be addressed later.

TRAINING

As a trainer the Community Consultant essentially designs and facilitates learning experiences for individuals or small groups, using the skills of a designer, facilitator, and evaluator of the learning process. This is a most essential role in facilitating any kind of change process within an organization or community group. The trainer role is one that is "appropriate when a particular learning process is indicated in order for the organization or community group to acquire competency in certain areas, or to gain specific skills for specific tasks, e.g. sponsoring a town meeting" (Lippitt, 1978, page 34).

The Community Consultant is also capable of transferring knowledge and skills that would enable the group to effectively participate in planning, decision-making, and problem-solving processes.

Community Development and other PRI activities in rural isolated areas, where resources are scarce, require special skills on the part of citizens so that the process can continue after the Community Consultant and resource team have completed their initial involvement. In contrast to the urban setting, effective rural citizens are significantly more dependent upon interagency collaboration and network support systems. PRI training activities typically are intended to transfer such skills and establish such networks among the participants. The skills may be organized into three areas: analytical skills, public meeting techniques and strategies for working groups (Luther and Spencer, 1979):

(A). Analytical: participants are expected to acquire the skills and knowledge to:

- assess their own skills levels
- diagnose community power structures
- diagnose community information networks
- Conduct needs assessment activities, formally and informally, within community groups
- implement evaluation techniques

(B). Public Meeting Techniques

- understand and control staging effects for public meetings such as seating arrangements, influences of atmosphere, etc.
- Share agendas
- give and receive information effectively in reports and presentations
- use process observation as a tool to evaluate and improve public meetings
- use communication skills such as behavior description, paraphrasing, perception check, and sharing feelings

(C). Strategies for Working Groups

- use brainstorming and futuring techniques to arrive at shared goals
- use systematic problem-solving techniques such as force-field analysis
- use concensus decision-making when possible
- use feedback as a means of planning and improving work sessions

A part and parcel of the training function is the aspect of process observation. The role of skilled process observer and process consultant is one that the Community Consultant is frequently called upon to assume. The traditional role has evolved from the early work of the National Training Laboratories (NTL) and has been extensively developed in human relations, behavior science, organizational development and other research.

The Community Consultant's basic rational(Pfeiffer and Jones, 1977) underlying the role of process helper is: 1) improved interaction leads to improved task accomplishment, 2) group's awareness of its own process preceeds wise choices about the management of time, 3) external interventions have less lasting effects than internal ones, 4) group process must be a continuing agenda item, and 5) changes in individual behavior come most effectively from changes in the ways the individuals are treated by groups.

Whether working with a small or large group, the Community Consultant attempts to increase the groups' awareness of its own functioning. Corolary objectives include facilitating increased effectiveness of the group's problem-solving process, increased commitment to shared objectives and shared leadership, and individuals' awareness of their personal functioning in the group.

Often the role of process helper and trainer are combined. Occasionally, the Community Consultant is requested to provide process consultation alone, to a group or organization. The Community Consultant's process skills are involved in all the functions she/he assumes, whether working with community client groups, the PRI organizational base, or their local operational base. The ability to serve as an objective observer and process consultant is invaluable to any group or organization.

On-going training activities in the PRI region are essential to the success of the project, as is the necessary skill of the Community Consultant in designing, facilitating and evaluating such activities. The ability to transfer skills and knowledge is implicit in all of the other functions the Community Consultant assumes. It is impossible to underestimate the training function within the overall PRI framework.

PROGRAM PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

One of the major functions incumbent upon the Community Consultant is that of stimulating or catalyzing program planning and development in the PRI region. Typically, the Community Consultant will receive a request for assistance to help develop a project or program. Often the individual or group requesting consultation is vague and unclear as to the specifics of the project; they are able to identify a problem, need or potential for growth within their group or community, and would like to initiate a process to solve the problem.

In most instances, the Community Consultant relies on models of problem solving to assist groups in developing their project. Problem solving processes are ways in which individuals and groups go about accomplishing their goals and purposes. A problem can be any discrepancy between the way things are and the way we want them to be. Groups and individuals go about problem solving continually. They may engage in problem solving consciously or unconsciously, perform it systematically or unsystematically and succeed in it well or poorly.

There are numerous problem-solving models being employed in various facets of organization development, management, human relations, counseling, and education to name but a few, however they all, at the most basic level, can be reduced to a five or six-step process, which is used by the PRI Community Consultant:

1. Defining the Problem. Defining the problem so that it may be effectively worked on. This typically involves conducting a needs assessment, prioritizing the needs and generating a goal statement that is heard by all members of the group.

2. Searching for alternatives. Creating various alternative solutions to the problem, including expanding the groups awareness of the options which exist, determining the implications of potential solutions, and choosing an alternative.

3. Planning for Action. Drawing up detailed plans for action, testing the plans against reality and drawing up plans for evaluating the results.

4. Carrying out the plan. Carry out the plans, collect data for possible modification and adapt and modify plans, if necessary.

5. Assessing the results. Assessing the project as a whole, including assessment of the method used to plan and implement, and evaluate.

Group problem solving can be powerful. It produces a lot of information on which to build solutions that are acceptable to a large number of people. The process typically takes considerable time and requires mutual cooperation and careful coordination, along with an adeptness at orchestrating the various components and phases of the process. An understanding of, and an ability to facilitate that which makes for effective groups, includes: 1) allowing information to flow openly, 2) communicating in ways that are clear and honest, 3) reaching agreement on a set of procedures to deal with concerns and problems, 4) basing decisions on data, 5) carefully making agreements and keeping commitments, 6) sharing individual goals and developing common goals, and 7) establishing meeting procedures that group members agree to follow.

In addition, Lippitt (1978) adds that individuals (such as PRI's Community Consultant) in the role of joint problem solver are able to assist working groups by: 1) perceiving the situation more clearly, 2) providing a more inclusive perspective of the situation by testing the assumptions, 3) helping define goals more clearly, 4) expressing and testing alternatives, 5) providing a sense of reality, 6) confronting sensitive areas, 7) saving time and resources, 8) reinforcing commitments, 9) linking existing resources to other resources, 10) catalyzing action, 11) reducing a problem into manageable parts, and 12) expanding client resources.

RESOURCE LINKING

The function of resource linker is defined by Havelock (1973, p. 18) as "someone who knows about resources, knows about peoples' needs, and knows how to bring client and resources together." The implications of this role for the Community Consultant working in rural areas is profound. No other individual in the small community is both knowledgeable, and has access to such a wide array of resources. Certain community actors (e.g. county agent, school superintendent, D.S.H.S. supervisor) have areas of expertise, and provide a resource linking function, but their scope is generally limited to their own specialization (i.e. agriculture, education, social services). The PRI Community Consultant tends to be broad-based in her/his knowledge of community and university resources and is thus able to reveal a wide range of options for action to the client group.

The role of resource linker is a highly non-uniform one, and thus requires a high degree of flexibility on the part of the Community Consultant, which entails fluid time schedules, open and multiple role definitations, a low level of formalization (i.e. few rules), and a minimun of bureaucratic procedures.

Rothman (1974) suggests that the Community Consultant's effectiveness can be enhanced through an approach to local populations, i.e. by working through the medium of opinion leaders. He states that the practitioner should be equipped with the capacity to the pinpoint and make contact with local opinion leaders, win their acceptance, obtain their legitimation for programs, and engage opinion leaders in surrogate functions.

Other professional and occupational groups in the local community may be utilized in a similar way. Often police, clergymen and doctors are already heavily involved in providing linkage (making referrals), and thus their natural, ongoing activities in the community can be enhanced by: a) increasing the number of clients who contact them, or b) providing them with specialized information or training which will permit such natural occupational linkers to carry out these functions with increased proficiency. Rothman asserts that the best means of providing resource linking to local communities is by organizing citizens and client groups to make their own claims. He further suggests that linking agents are advised not to take for granted that agencies manifest an enlightened outlook, and should be prepared to tolerate a reasonably high degree of role strain as an ongoing feature of the job.

Inherent in the resource linking role is that of an information specialist. The traditional role of any type of consultant is that of a specialist who, through special knowledge, skill, and professional experience, is engaged in special-knowledge services. The client is mainly responsible for defining the problem and the objectives of the consultation, and the consultant assumes a directive role until the client is comfortable with the particular approach recommended (Lippitt, 1978).

In contrast to this traditional consultant role, few situations exist where special expertise or knowledge on the part of the PRI Community Consultant is indicated or appropriate. Typically, the Community Consultant serves the capacity of assessing and exploring with the

client (community) their needs, helping them to define the problem, linking the client with the necessary technical or social resources, and evaluating the outcomes. Instead of assuming a directive role, the Community Consultant takes a more client-centered approach (Rogers, 1969), and facilitates the community's own problem definition and needs assessment.

In this non-directive manner, the community group develops their own skills and resources which can be used again and again, thus removing the increased dependence on external specialized skills and knowledge. The Community Consultant approach further helps to build collaborative networks within communities because of the increased reliance upon internal resources. The development of special skills and knowledge on the part of citizens, insures that the process begun with Community Consultant assistance will continue following the termination of direct external support.

The Community Consultant should, however, be aware of how the needs of a community group encourage the Community Consultant to assume a more directive role:

> .....the role of "expert" is a quite seductive one for the consultant - all the more so in behavioral science since the variables and their relationships are often quite fuzzy and complex. It can be personally gratifying to have others see me as someone who really "knows" what is going on or what should be done in a given situation. Besides personal gratification on the part of the consultant, another factor pushes him toward the stance of expert: the client's wish to see himself safely in the hands of an expert who is wise and able so that anxiety over present or future difficulties can be reduced. (Steele, 1969, p. 193-194).

These dynamics are especially operative in the Community Consultant's relationship with rural communities, which have even less access to specialized resources and technical skills and knowledge. However, if the Community Consultant can successfully resist the temptation to assume the directive role, and instead facilitate the community's acquisition of necessary skills, the result will be an active citizenry, responsive local government, and a collaborative network support system.

The one possible exception is that the Community Consultant's expertise in the process of problem-solving. The Community Consultant can still maintain a non-directive role, while providing specialized knowledge on how to proceed with the process:

> .....the consultant should not withhold his expertise on matters of the learning process itself; but he should be very careful not to confuse being an expert on how to help an organization to learn with being an expert on the actual management problems which the organization is trying to solve. (Shein, 1969, p. 120).

Each of these Community Consultant roles (i.e. training, program development, and resource linking) are central to PRI's commitment to collaborative interorganizational networking. Without such a network, and the freedom it provides, successful performance of these roles would be impossible.

ORGANIZATIONAL BASE

The Community Consultant's organizational base, i.e. the PRI operating structure, contributes importantly to her/his ability to assume the "neutral square" role referred to in foregoing section, without this sense of collaboration and cooperation that is inherent in PRI's working model, the Community Consultant would be severely limited and handicapped in attempting to reduce the piecemeal approach of rural social service delivery.

Numerous models have been presented in the past decade attempting to increase the level and coordination of educational resource delivery to rural poorly-served environs, (Havelock, 1969; Rothman, 1974; Sismondo, 1973; Eberts, 1971; Moe and Tamblyn, 1974; Mulford, Klonglan, et al, 1975). These models have been useful in formulating and developing the PRI paradigm. Yet, they do not go far enough, and do not hit squarely upon the notion of interorganizational collaboration as the key element in coordinating and streamlining resource delivery.

The organizations, institutions, and agencies that comprise The "Partnership" for Rural Improvement all have a mandate and commitment to provide resources and/or services to an 11-county jurisdiction in Northeast and Northcentral Washington. Understandably, the possibility for competition, and in the extreme, sabotage, exists. Where two different organizations provide the same services, the desire to "do a better job" is often implicitly (and explicitly) operative.

The "partner" organizations in this case are not unique in terms of their structure, mission or personnel. They could be any set of organizations with a common responsibility. What is different about this set of organizations is precisely their common commitment to a collaborative working structure, and their recognized need for a neutral third-party staff member*. If this staff member was alligned with, or funded by, any one organization, her/his effectiveness would be limited. In addition, the level of trust given the Community Consultant by the other partners would be weakened, and consequently, their position and ability to facilitate collaborative interdependence would be less significant.

Given PRI's operating structure, however, the neutral, third party role of the community consultant provides a higher degree of trust and openness among organizations, and ultimately a more efficient, and cost-effective approach to resource delivery. Without the Community Consultant staff position, organizations could, given a common commitment to interdependence, achieve a high degree of collaboration and coordination.

* The literature suggests that certain elements preceed and allow interorganizational collaboration (Beal, 1971; Finley, 1967; Rogers, 1973). The same literature also suggests certain obstacles and barriers exist to collaboration. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss these elements beyond mentioning that they exist. A forthcoming PRI paper will take up this issue in greater depth.

However, the degree and significance of their collaborative relationship would not be as great if there did not exist the Community Consultant responsible for mediating conflict, nurturing relationships, identifying and developing cooperative projects, and in general, providing an organizational maintenance function.

We can see then that the relationship the Community Consultant maintains with the organizational base is key to the success of PRI as a whole. The relationship is mutually affirming and reinforcing, i.e. the collaborative nature of the partnership enables the Community Consultant to assume a "neutral square" position within the operating structure, which in turn assures and facilitates the on-going supportive and coordinated relationship the partners have amongst themselves, which ultimately provides an improved approach to rural service delivery.

LOCAL OPERATIONAL BASE

Within the overarching structure of PRI exists three separate and distinct, yet interrelated subregions. The map on page 5 shows the geographical bounderies of the respective Western, Central, and Eastern jurisdictions. These subregions were formed early in PRI out of the recognition of the need to build linkages among geographically compatible agencies. The subregions provide for the vehicle for: 1) identifying the needs of public service users, and 2) creating and facilitating networks and communication patterns among the public service providers.

The subregional committees are comprised of representatives of both users and providers within the subregional jurisdiction.

As with other units within PRI, the subregions are characterized by a certain value orientation, which colors the relationship the various agencies have amongst themselves. They seem to be "committed to participatory decision-making, to building effective groups through group development techniques, to simplifying complex organizational and communication structures to provide easier access to the resources in those units, and to sharing the news that interdependence among individuals and among organizations is inescapable." (Hagood, 1979, p. 7)

Throughout its four years, PRI has examined periodically the issue of building effective organizational relationships among the various agencies in each subregion. That experience provides a unique perspective on what are the necessary conditions for these relationships to be built and endure. Three of the key ingredients include the following (Hagood, 1979, p. 8):

- The subregions have adopted a program development strategy which focuses on building linkages among providers and users of services, but carefully taking programming cues from the needs of the users. Each subregion has developed a set of criteria to enable them to better assess the potential of each project in meeting this objective.

- the subregions have taken on an organizational design which is developmental and flexible, and which allows the needs of public service users to dictate the structure and membership.

- a neutral third party staff person who organized, nutures, and maintains the optimal level of interorganizational cooperation.

The first two points have been discussed in other PRI documents, (e.g. PRI ANNUAL REPORT, 1979), and will not be addressed here. It is the latter point that will be taken up briefly in this section.

The relationship the PRI Community Consultant has with his/her Subregion is very similar to the relationship she/he has with PRI's operating structure. Central to both sets of relationships is the notion of collaboration and participatory decision-making.

From the onset PRI has explored various methods of positively increasing the level of communication, interaction, and interdependence among subregional public service agencies. The PRI Community Consultant has been central to that effort. At least three roles can be identified that the Community Consultant assumes: 1) Convener, 2) Nurturer, and 3) Mediator.

Each of the three PRI subregions has as its decision making body, a committee made up of representatives from the public service providers and public service users within its respective geographical jurisdiction. The subregional committees vary from six to twelve members. The PRI Community Consultant serves as the ex-officio member of the committee, taking responsibility for convening meetings, providing salient information to members, and generally keeping abreast of what is happening in the subregion.

Perhaps the most significant work is done behind the scenes. The Community Consultant can be found on the phone attempting to set up a meeting between two different educational institutions that are experiencing "turf" problems, or building a "link" between various social service agencies that are overlapping in their delivery of services.

The "home base" for the three Community Consultants is with the State Community College network. The PRI Community Consultant in the Western Subregion is housed at Wenatchee Valley College; the Central Subregion headquarters are at Big Bend Community College, and in the East, the Community Consultant finds a nest at Spokane Falls Community College. The placement of these Community Consultants is significant in that the Community Consultant is able to reach beyond the normal range of the Community College through the collaborative network established by PRI. By placing the PRI Community Consultant within its administrative structure the community college district is better able to fulfill its mandate of meeting the educational needs of the regional community, especially in the rural areas.

NURTERER

A coalition or partnership of any kind requires some entity to hold it together. Independent agencies, even though administratively or structureally connected, tend eventually to move in different directions unless continued effort is made to nurture and enhance their collaborative activity and commitment.

Within an academic or public service setting, overload and complexity abound. No one individual, with the exception of one or two administrators, has the time or skill to sort it all out. When a number of these organizations attempt coordinating efforts, the inner dynamics are potentially chaotic and disasterous.

We can see, then, the importance of providing staff time and resources to the role of what we're calling "nurturing". For without this role, any commitment to collaborative inter-organizational networking is less significant, and often short lived. Within the PRI subregion, and among the various "partner" organizations, this role is performed by the Community Consultant.

In assuming this role, the Community Consultant wears a number of hats simultaneously, ranging from information broker to counselor. Cohen and March, in their chapter, Leadership in an Organized Anarchy (1974), identify the various dynamics and nuances that are operative in performing a nurturing role within an interorganizational context:

1. Most issues most of the time have low salience for most people. The decisions to be made within the organization secure only partial and erratic attention from participants in the organization. A major share of the attention devoted to a particular issue is tied less to the content of the issue than to its symbolic significance for individual and group esteem.

2. The total system has high inertia. Anything that requires a coordinated effort of the organization in order to start is unlikely to be started. Anything that requires a coordinated effort of the organization in order to be stopped is unlikely to be stopped.

3. Any decision can become a garbage can for almost any problem. The issues discussed in the context of any particular decision depend less on the decision or problems involved than on the timing of their joint arrivals and the existence of alternative arneas for exercising problems.

4. The processes of choice are easily subjected to overload. When the load on the system builds up relative to its capabilities for exercising and resolving problems, the decision outcomes in the organization tend to become increasingly separated from the formal process of decision.

5. The organization has a weak information base. Information about past events or past decisions is often not retained. When retained, it is often difficult to retrieve. Information about current activities is scant.

Cohen and March admit to the conspicuousness and ubiguitousness of these properties, but feel an understanding of them represents important opportunities for tactical action that, in a modest way, strengthens the interorganizational structure as a whole.

The PRI Community Consultant's role is neutral. Their interest is in promoting the development of the network as a whole, yet also nurturing and encouraging each of the individual partners. Cohen and March, in their chapter referenced above, suggest some basic rules for working in a complex interorganizational context. A synopsis of their points are included below because they are indicative of the kind of variables and dynamics inherent in the PRI Community Consultant's nurturing role.

RULE 1: SPEND TIME. All complex organizations suffer from a shortage of decision making energy. If the Community Consultant is able and willing to devote time to the activities within the organization, she/he has a considerable claim on the system. By

spending time on the homework for a decision or activity, the Community Consultant becomes a major information source in an information-poor world.

RULE 2: EXCHANGE STATUS FOR SUBSTANCE. The Community Consultant who is concerned less with receiving credit for projects and activities and more concerned with the actual benefit derived by the subregion will succeed in producing substantial gain and change.

RULE 3: FACILITATE OPPOSITION PARTICIPATION. Persons outside the formal ranks of authority tend to have aspirations for change that are substantially greater than the aspirations for change held by persons with formal authority. One obvious solution is to facilitate participation in decision making, which acts as an effective depressant of exaggerated aspirations.

RULE 4: OVERLOAD THE SYSTEM. Since we're talking about energy-poor organizations, accomplishing overload is not hard. This means having a large repertoire of projects for inter-organizational action. Within an organized anarchy it is a mistake to become absolutely committed to any one project.

RULE 5: PROVIDE GARBAGE CANS. One of the complications in accomplishing something in a garbage can decision-making process is the tendency for any particular project to become intertwined with a variety of other issues simply because those issues exist at a time the project is before the organization.

It is pointless to try to react to such problems by attempting to enforce rules of relevance. The appropriate tactical response is to provide garbage cans into which wide varieties of problems can be dumped. On a grand scale, discussions of overall organizational objectives or overall organizational long-term plans are classic first-quality cans. Projects of serious substative concern can then follow and be dealt with without an throng of distraction.

RULE 6: MANAGE UNOBTRUSIVELY. A central tactic in high-inertia systems is to use high leverage minor actions to produce major effects-to let the system go where it wants to go with only minor interventions that make it go where it should. Unobtrusive management uses interventions of greater impact than visibility.

The task of nurturing, encouraging, and maintaining a network of highly complex organizations is difficult, to say the least. PRI has explored ways of better facilitating collaborative interdependence, and will continue to do so. What has been made explicitly clear, though, is the need for a neutral, third-party who's function is to nurture the interorganizational structure as a whole.

MEDIATOR

Within any network of potentially competitive and territorial organizations, there exists at times, conflict. Even the most skillful and adroit administrators are unable to manage such conflict from within their own operating sphere. It thus requires little substantiation to see clearly the need for the neutral PRI Community Consultant to mediate conflict within the interorganizational network.

What follows is a brief discussion of some of the necessary characteristics of the successful Community Consultant as seen from this author's perspective. The section is not intended as definitive or all-inclusive. It is merely intended to point out some of the more obvious parameters and considerations relative to success of the PRI Community Consultant role.

NECESSARY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY CONSULTANT

VALUES, PERCEPTIONS, ATTITUDES

The actions of the PRI Community Consultant are influenced by the same kinds of values, perceptions and attitudes that affect any human being. Some differences apply, however. The Community Consultant, for instance, must develop an understanding of his, her own attitudes and values, and the effect they have on his/her actions. It is possible, and perhaps easy, to make the incorrect assumption that the Community Consultant can develop some kind of pure objectivity, suppress feelings, and operate unhampered by the usual complex of values,perceptions and attitudes. This is not only impossible, but undesirable. It is desirable and essential that the Community Consultant understand his/her own values and how they influence their personal actions, style, and indirectly, the response of others. For example, ones approach to community problem-solving is affected by their own value-tinged perceptions. One may view the cause of delinquency as individual, group-related and linked to social influences in the local community. Another might perceive the problem as symptomatic of basic defects in the whole structure of society. And yet another might see the delinquency problem as a failure of institutional arrangements in the courts and public housing projects. These perceptions would significantly effect the procedure and steps one would take in dealing with the problem.

SELF AWARENESS AS A WAY OF LIFE

Individuals change constantly, according to the situation in which they find themselves at any given moment. (Guthrie and Miller, 1979). Life itself is a constant state of flux, but the Community Consultant can adjust to its changing realities by being aware of what is going on within her/him at each moment. Self-awareness is especially necessary to the Community Consultnat since she/he operates out of a number of different roles from trainer to observer to problem-solver and switches roles numerous times during a particular day, depending on phone calls, which meetings are scheduled, or what that morning paper says. In addition to these external factors, Community Consultants have personal needs and private lives to attend to. Since the outside world is so unpredictable and unstable, the only way to maintain a sense of continuity is to remain inwardly "together". No formulas exist as guides to self-awareness, it is the difficult process of maintaining continual contact with ones internal workings; ones feelings, emotions, ideas, thoughts, values and so on.

AVOIDING BURNOUT

To say that someone is "in burnout" is to say that she/he is somewhere in a progressive process of fatigue and depletion of personal resources; Mitchell(1977) identifies accurately the dilemna to which Community Consultants are susceptible:

> Like a minister or priest, the Community Consultant sees a better world. She/he believes it can become a reality yet know the inappropriateness of "selling" it. It has to be modeled, to be demonstrated, to be made easily available to others. Too, the work of the consultant is often intangible. Not only is the impact of his/her efforts rarely visible directly, but there is a dynamic quality to individuals and organizations that tends to blur

> the importance of the consultant's contribution to perceived changes. There is also the sensation of impermanence. Time moves on (what have you done for me recently?). Additionally, the needs of the clients cause them to take more and more from the consultant. The consultant feels less and less able to be human and more and more like a dispenser. And on top of it all, there is the continual aloneness-often simply a result of the way the consultant works-that leaves the individual little time to devote to his/her own needs.

Mitchell goes on to suggest ways in which the Community Consultant might avoid burning him/herself out: 1) put limits on the amount of hours, and days per month spent in actual consulting 2) set time aside for yourself and use it, even if you feel "high" and think you do not need it 3) work with co-consultants-particularly with people you like, whenever possible 4) develop long-term consulting relationships which will allow the possibility of seeing greater results of your efforts, and 5) arrange to be with "significant others" on a regular basis, if possible.

For the Community Consultant, as for any consultant, burnout can be common, tremendously debilitating, and likely to be unrecognized until the symptoms become problems. Awareness and coping mechanisms are not only helpful, but necessary.

THE NEED FOR LOCAL CONTROL

Since the turn of the century, the autonomy and local control of rural communities has gradually been eroded away. One of the goals of the Partnership for Rural Improvement is to mitigate this

side effect of industrialization and centralization. But the subleties and nuances of an outside "professional" such as the Community Consultant attempting enhance rural community are enormous. (Inglis 1974) in his address on "Professionalism in Community Development" to the 2nd International Consultation on Community Development, identifies the irony and complexity of the task:

> "Community Development in this sense is what is going on when the people of a community work together to build a church, organize a local council, or drive out an unpopular person. It is by its essence local, indigenous, and in North America it is an increasingly rare phenonmenon. The trend is toward homogenization - toward the swallowing up of the local and indigenous by the central and urban.
>
> It is not necessary to document in detail how the process has gone on - we are all aware of the ways in which communities in North America have lost autonomy and identity through expansion of the media, the centralization of school systems, the improvement in transportation facilities, and the growth of large - scale manufacturing, distributing and retailing of goods and services. For the most part, people have welcomed these changes, because they have meant, or have been accompanied by, material improvements in standard of living. However, the changes also produce problems - communities are "left behind"; ways of making a living disappear; new modes of organization cause social problems. Since the forces that produce the changes are beyond the control of the people of the small-community, their main recourse is to rely increasingly upon outside agencies for direction. The result is a self-reinforcing cycle in which outside-generated change produces local problems; communities seek outside help - usually from central governments; and the governments respond with centrally-devised programmes which further weaken local decision-making and reinforce the dependency of the community on outside agencies. The process goes on at all levels. The autonomy of Harbour Wrain is pre-empted by St. John's, the autonomy of St. John's is eroded by Ottawa, and Ottawa's autonomy, God help us, is swallowed up by Washington and New York.

> With the capital letters, then, Community Development should mean an intervention in this process designed to help communities to retain, gain, or regain some of the identity and autonomy of action that allows them to be thought of as communities in the first place rather than simply as aggregations of population.
>
> ...We need, firs of all, a commitment to the idea that small units of culture and society have an intrinsic value, and that is is worth spending money, effort, and time in preserving them and giving them the opportunity to develop in their own terms.
>
> We need experts but we need them in the right place... they should be telling people how to accomplish things, not what to accomplish. Real Community Development has to be done by the people of the community, and the role of rational and provincial governments should be to set up the larger framework within which people can make their own choices and pursue their own ends. The last thing we need is a group of highly-educated, highly paid, self-interested professionals getting in the way".

The challenge then for the Community Consultant, is to facilitate local autonomy and control in a most unobtrusive fashion. An important first step is to adopt an attitude of humility, taking a "low-key" position whenever working in a community. The Community Consultant should realize that she/he is an outsider, skilled at facilitating community decision-making, but an outsider nevertheless, and her/his work should reflect such an attitude.

COMMITMENT TO HUMANITY, DEMOCRACY, OBJECTIVITY AND CHANGE

Although the "worldview" of the Community Consultant cannot be stated in a prescriptive manner, certain broad-based "working values" are conducive to successfully operate in the various arenas of the community client group, organizational base, and local operational base. These working values can be identified as a commitment to:

1) humanity, 2) democracy, 3) objectivity, and 4) change.

1. Humanity: The Community Consultant holds a generally positive view of those with whom she/he works, and feels a sense of empathy and concern for them. She/he perceives and conveys to individuals a sense that they are creative, and responsible, encouraging ownership of ideas and community projects.

2. Democracy: Luther and Braglio (1978) state well the necessity of a commitment to participatory democracy: "The expertise involved in working with groups involves not only a specific set of skills but a system of underlying values related to human relations. A basic tenet of the facilitator is a belief in shared decision-making and the value of the individual input. People who are affected by decisions should have an opportunity to influence those decisions".

3. Objectivity: The Community Consultant must maintain a sense of objectivity and neutrality both in working externally and internally. If she/he begins being perceived as an advocate of a certain position or group, his/her strength as a neutral third-party will be weakened.

4. Change: The Community Consultant views purposive social change not only as possible, but healthy. Life asserts that change is a reality; the Community Consultant believes change can, and should, be purposeful, and that problem-solving should be proactive rather than reactive.

POWER BASES

Power is inherent, whether explicit or implicit, in any given context or situation. Thus, it is critical that the Community Consultant understand the dynamics of their own and other's power. Power is neither good nor bad in itself, it is a variable that needs addressing and understanding. To most people, power has negative connotations, but power is merely the ability of an individual or group to influence other individuals or groups. Taken in this context, power can be seen positively, as a dynamic that is continually operative, whether or not she/he is aware of it, the

Community Consultant's style in a leadership or facilitator role is affected, to a large degree, by his/her power base.

A number of power bases have been identified over the years as potential means of successfully influencing the behavior of others (French and Raven, 1959; Raven and Kruglanski, 1975; Hersey, Blanchard, and Natemeyer, 1979). Seven power bases are defined below:

1. Coercive Power is based on fear. A leader high in Coercive power is seen as inducing compliance because failure to comply will lead to punishment such as undesirable work assignments, reprimands, or dismissal.

2. Connection Power is based in the leader's "connections" with influential or important persons inside or outside the organization. A leader high in connection power induces compliance from others because they aim at gaining the favor or avoiding the disfavor of the powerful connection.

3. Reward Power is based on the leader's ability to provide rewards for other people. They believe that their compliance will lead to gaining positive incentives such as pay, promotion, or recognition.

4. Legitimate Power is based on the position held by the leader. Normally, the higher the position, the higher the legitimate power tends to be. A leader high in legimate power induces compliance or influences others because they feel that this person has the right, by virtue of position in the organization, to expect that suggestions will be followed.

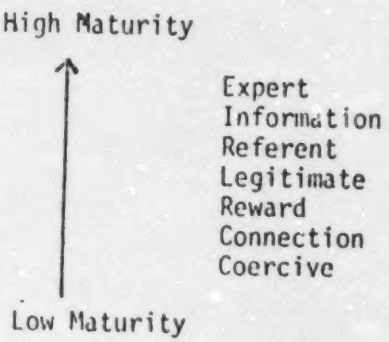
5. Referent Power is based on the leader's personal traits. A leader high in referent power is generally liked and admired by others because of personality. This liking for, admiration for, and identification with the leader influences others.

6. Information Power is based on the leader's possession of or access to information that is perceived as valuable to others. This power base influences others because they need this information or want to be "in on things".

7. Expert Power is based on the leader's possession of expertise, skill, and knowledge, which, through respect, influence others. A leader high in expert power is seen as possessing the expertise to facilitate the work behavior of others. This respect leads to compliance with the leader's wishes.

Numerous studies (Bachman, Bowers and Marcus, 1968; Ivencevich and Donelly, 1970; Burke and Wilcox, 1971; Jamiesen and Thomas, 1974) have attempted to examine the relationship between the facilitator's primary power base and the clients' performance, but the results suggest that the appropriate power base is largely affected by situational variables. In other words, the Community Consultant should be aware of, and vary the use of power depending on the circumstances.

As individuals and groups move from lower levels to higher levels of "maturity" (i.e. competence, creativity, autonomy, etc.) the impact of the various power bases changes (Hersey, Blanchard, Natermeyer, 1979):



As indicated in the figure above, the Community Consultant that is working with a highly motivated, mature group would be most effective utilizing power bases that aim at gaining influence with people, rather than those which emphasize compliance.

In attempting to gain additional information about the use of power by the three Community Consultants within PRI, we administered to each of them a "Power Perception Profile" developed by Hersey and Natemeyer (1979), which provides leader/facilitators with feedback on power bases they already have and those which they need to develop. The Profile contains twenty-one forced choice pairs of reasons often given by leaders when asked why others do things they suggest or want them to do. Each statement reflects one of the seven sources of power discussed earlier. After completing the questionnaire, respondents are able to obtain a score of the relative strength of each of the seven bases of power.

Examination of the three Community Consultant responses and profiles provides further information about the uniqueness of the role. A good deal of consistency existed across the board for the three Community Consultants. All three seemed exceptionally high on the catagories of "expert," "information" and "referent". The low catagories were "legitimate," "coercive" and "connection."

These results support the notion that Community Consultants hold influence within individuals and groups because of their inherent skills and knowledge, rather than their influence based on position, past experience or connections with influential persons. Because PRI is new and innovative, the Community Consultant must "earn" the respect and legitimacy they hold, which is somewhat divergent from other positions where individuals hold influence based on credentials, title or position. Therefore, the Community Consultant must be competent, knowledgeable and skilled. She/he must have what it takes to earn respect and trust.

The best attribute the Community Consultant has is themself. They must think on their feet, create as they go, and be prepared to deal with anything that may arise.

EDUCATION AND PERSONAL GROWTH

Each Community Consultant builds her/his abilities and proficiencies from her/his own knowledge and experiences, and integrates these in a different way. There is no formal education that can prepare an individual for the role of the Community Consultant, although supportive learning does exist which can be helpful, including such areas as education, anthropology, management, planning, sociology, public administration, psychology, etc. Short-term courses and training workshops also exist which can be extremely helpful, especially to a Community Consultant lacking understanding and skills in a specific area. PRI has made available training funds for Community Consultants to educate themselves in this manner.

The prime requisite for the education of the Community Consultant seems to be a personal commitment to continued learning and growth, an appetite for knowledge and diversified reading. An exceptionally broad interest in almost everything is helpful. Whatever knowledge and experience the Community Consultant has can be useful. The breadth of experience and knowledge is the significant element, not the specific nature of the Community Consultant's formal education.

AUTONOMY AND AMBIGUITY

The field-based nature of the Community Consultant role with the PRI organization dictates a high degree of autonomy and ambiguity on the part of the Community Consultant. This variable can either be helpful or counterproductive, depending on the internal needs of the person fulfilling the role. An individual requiring a high degree of role specificity will undoubtedly not survive long in the Community Consultnat role, nor will they be successful. The need to receive instructions from an "authority figure" would have to be dealt with prior to successfully undertaking the tasks implicit in the position.

The lack of structure in which the Community Consultant finds her/himself can either have a positive effect of a devastating one. The ability to create one's own role orientation and structure is essential. A somewhat common and expected statement by persons in similar positions is "I don't know what to do." At this point the autonomy and ambiguity has caught up with the individual and has produced a paralytic effect. (Guthrie and Miller, in their book Making Change, 1977) address the issue of "What to do when you don't know what to do":

> .....we frequently find ourselves in situations where we simply don't know what to do next. These are times when all the diagnostic tools and techniques in the world seem irrelevant, and we are unable to come up with appropriate answers. Situations like these are inevitable for those who work with people, and it's important to have ways to handle them. Learning occurs at those times when you don't know what to do.

They go on to suggest three ways of getting "unstuck":

1. Identifying when you don't know what to do. Every individual has signals that they give off when stuck, for example, pulling back and trying not to be noticed, expending alot of energy and getting nowhere. Once the Community Consultant admits she/he doesn't know what to do, it becomes easire to be creative, ask for help and explore new options.

2. Getting prepared for action. It is important to remember that problems are solvable and that unlimited possibilities for action exist in any situation. It is sometimes most effective to retreat formally to gain a new perspective and prepare for getting "unstuck".

3. Figuring out what to do. Beginning to think positively opens up exciting possibilities. Brainstorming generates ideas to choose from. It is sometimes helpful to act on one's hunches. Writing down what is going on and what needs to happen next also facilitates action.

The Community Consultant that learns what to do when she/he doesn't know what to do will realize that there is indeed a way of getting unstuck, and will better avoid getting stuck in the first place. The Community Consultant who thinks more in terms of possibilities than limitations, will run into less dead ends.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We have examined three sets of relationships within which the PRI Community Consultant operates: client groups, the organizational structure of PRI, and the local operational base. Within each set of relationships the Community Consultant assumes various roles and functions not unique to PRI, and similar to roles and functions assumed by other professionals in fields of community development, human relations training, organizational development, and others. The difference, vis á vis other professionals, lies in the unique collaborative operating structure of PRI. The PRI Community Consultant is increasingly effective as a trainer, change agent, resource linker, nurturer, etc., due principally to his/her non-alligned position within the consortium of public service organizations. As a "neutral square" the Community Consultant feels increased freedom to move into "uncharted waters" and attempt collaborative, capacity-building programs. The mutually reinforcing relationship between the Community Consultant and the Partnership serves as a rejuvinating and enhancing aspect.

We have also seen the absolute necessity of this neutral, third-party who organizes, nurtures,and maintains the optimal level of interorganization cooperation. It is clear that these roles and functions cannot effectively be performed by a staff member from one of the participating partners. If PRI, and other similar consortia are to continue to succeed, they will have to continue their commitment to allocating staff time and resources to the Community Consultant position.

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